Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Monday, April 22, 2013

The meeting came to order in Gasson 105 at about 1:10 p.m.

Present were Nasser Behnegar, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Laura Hake, Arthur Madigan, Catherine Read, and James Weiss.

The minutes of the meeting of Thursday, April 4, 2013 were approved.

The committee provisionally approved SC 096 Aging and Society proposed by Sociology for Social Science core credit, with the expectation that Sociology would send a fuller version of the cover sheets.

The main business of the meeting was discussion of the proposal “Toward a Renewed Core” of April 18, 2013. It was noted that according to the proposal the new Core Renewal Committee would come into effect on September 1, 2013. One colleague thought it would be just as well to delay implementation for one more year. Recalling the founding of Capstone, another thought there ought to be a one-year pilot program to identify possible kinks in the new program before the proposal is approved. A third colleague noted that the proposal makes reference to pilot courses in academic year 2013-2014. Referring to the Implementation Road Map, a fourth said she had thought that the proposal was to be implemented more slowly. She thought that Mary Crane understands that it will take time to develop the new programs. She also asked what sort of program there would be to assess the effectiveness of the proposed labs and other features of the new programs. A fifth colleague asked whether it was necessary to approve the core proposal before offering new-style courses. A sixth colleague presumed that the new CRC would need to approve the new courses for core credit, though it was not yet clear how the approval process would work.

Discussion then turned to makeup and terms of reference of the CRC. A colleague asked whether the CRC might have two or more members from the same department. He suggested that the Complex Problems format favored some departments over others. These and similar issues are important and should not be rushed. Another colleague expressed concern about the long-term viability of the proposed new programs, inasmuch as our current faculty have not been hired with an eye to taking part in such programs. He doubted that faculty will want to teach these new courses every year. For the program to work will require a long-term re-orientation of faculty culture. A third colleague spoke of the proposal as a train coming down the mountain. He thought that Mary Crane and David Quigley might reply that they intended to make readiness to teach in the new programs a factor in future hiring. He thought that the new CRC would have more power than the UCDC had ever had. Another colleague thought that the proposal had been designed by higher ups, with faculty just offering suggestions. This does not bode well for the success of the proposal.

A colleague recounted Theology’s decision not to take part in the new first-year core programs but to preserve its current two-semester core sequences. Another colleague noted the need to link core courses closely with advisement. A third colleague noted that implementing the proposal would require considerable resources and involve considerable opportunity costs. A fourth noted that the proposal would require additional administrators. A fifth was not sure that it would.

Pointing to provisions for the use of TAs and post-docs, a colleague wondered whether were going to allow the needs of core programs to determine the size of graduate programs. Another colleague cited a Natural Science department that uses graduate students as labor and then gets rid of half of them. She said that there are many ways of engaging actively in disciplines, and many ways of connecting disciplines. Students, she said, want to be treated as adults. She cited Jennie Purnell’s positive experience with STM students who led reflection sessions. The professional formation of doctoral students has many different layers.

A colleague reported faculty as saying that the hardest thing about the Cornerstone program is the logistics of co-curricular activities, with their attendant issues of security and liability. She asked how co-curricular activities would be organized for the new programs.

Discussion turned to the source of complaints, if any, about the current core. A colleague remarked that complaints about the core came mainly from first-year students and that they often result from bad advisement on the part of faculty. Another colleague reported Dean Andy Boynton to the effect that faculty and students were not excited about the core. A third mentioned the desire to do something about the problem of students covering much of the core through Advanced Placement courses. One remedy for this might be to require students who satisfy a core requirement with an AP course to take a high-level course in the same discipline.

At this point Arthur Madigan asked we had sufficient consensus to go on record. A colleague thought that we had consensus that it was not practical to implement the core proposal, even at the low level envisioned, in academic year 2013-2014. Another reminded the group that the core team recognizes that the first year is going to be a pilot year, more fluid and open to influence from faculty. The first colleague replied that the proposal involved a major reorganization of the core and the there was no flexibility about format of the Enduring Questions and Complex Problems courses. The second colleague pointed out that the format had emerged from faculty discussions. A third allowed that there was a lot of faculty input, but said that the proposal was the work of a small group. A fourth said that Mary Crane had said that there was no question of reducing the overall footprint of the core. She wished that she had known that. The first colleague agreed that the reduction was slight, from 15 required courses to 14, but added that Enduring Questions and Complex Problems overlay the core requirement.

A colleague then asked about possible structures to review of the implementation of the new core. He suggested the Board of A & S Chairs as a possible review mechanism. Another colleague was not in favor of this, but was in favor of some form of review. A third thought that the UCDC should remain in existence for another year to handle assessment, approval of core status for courses, and Cultural Diversity credit. We will go through a transitional period while the earlier core is still partly in force.

Discussion then turned to how various groups of students (Natural Science majors, premeds) would fare in the new core, and how it would affect programs such as Pulse and Perspectives.

A colleague moved the following motion: “That the University Core Development Committee strongly recommends that the new core not be adopted. If the new core is adopted, we recommend that it not be implemented until September 1, 2014, to allow time for the development of courses and to elect the members of the new Core Renewal Committee.” The motion was seconded and then passed by a vote of 7-0-0.

The same colleague moved the following motion: “The University Core Development Committee strongly recommends that there be a process to review not only the elements of the renewed core but the structure of the core itself, and that this review be carried out by a body other than that which designed the renewed core.” The motion was seconded and then passed by a vote of 7-0-0.

A colleague proposed that Arthur Madigan draft a summary of the UCDC’s concerns about the new core. This was agreed to.

It was also agreed that these motions and the summary of concerns should be sent to the president, with copies to the core team, the provost, et al.

[It should be noted that the subsequent discussion of how to present these motions brought out that the UCDC as a whole was far from unanimous in its views about the core renewal proposal. In the end our presentation to the president was a divided report.]

The meeting adjourned at about 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Arthur Madigan, S.J.